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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
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Объединённых Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

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FAO Regional Conference for Africa

Thirty-first Session¹

26 – 28 October 2020

**Concept Note on Hand-in-Hand Initiative: A New Approach to Combat
Poverty and Hunger**

I. Introduction

1. The 2014 African Union (AU) Malabo Declaration² states commitments on strengthening mutual accountability, which seeks to mobilize stronger political will by African leaders and is channelled through a peer review mechanism for the effective leadership, stronger country ownership and partnership that ultimately drive sustainable agricultural growth and transformation. Member countries engage in a biennial agricultural review process that involves tracking, monitoring and reporting on implementation progress but also fostering alignment, harmonization and coordination among multisectoral efforts and multi-institutional platforms. It also aims to strengthen national and regional institutional capacities for knowledge and data generation and management that support evidence-based planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

2. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides mechanisms to facilitate and support member countries in the implementation as well as review and reporting of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at both national and global levels.

3. Significant convergences exist among most of the indicators developed to measure progress in the implementation of the Malabo Declaration and the SDG indicators. Member countries have been making efforts towards integrating these into their national agricultural policy frameworks and reporting processes with the aim to have an integrated framework and set up common implementation mechanisms to deliver results. This is a key feature to rationalize the resources invested in these processes as well as reduce efforts made by countries to report on both frameworks.

¹ Rescheduled from 23-27 March 2020, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

² African Union, 2014. Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9661-assembly_au_dec_517_-545_xxiii_e.pdf

4. Both commitments call for a country-owned and country-led review and evaluations based on high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated data. The challenge of generating such data has been acknowledged, but the need to intensify efforts to strengthen statistical capacities of member countries has also been emphasized.

The Challenge: Slow Progress Toward Eradicating Hunger and Poverty in Africa

5. The AU has adopted a mutual accountability framework, which sets out principles for peer review, and a results framework to guide the tracking of performance indicators. Based on these frameworks, two subsequent biennial reviews were conducted in 2017 and 2019 to evaluate country performance in achieving the Malabo commitments. The latest review report was presented to the January 2020 AU Summit. These reports indicate that, despite the efforts exerted and progress made, several countries still faced challenges to get on track for achieving the Malabo commitments. For example, the 2020 report indicates that, out of the 33 member states reporting progress on undernourishment, only eight were on track, stressing that undernourishment was still high (above 25 percent) in 14 member states.

6. The UN joint report on The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019³ indicates that hunger has been on the rise in Africa for three consecutive years with prevalence of undernourishment having reached levels of 22.8 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. The sub-Saharan region has also seen a steady increase of the number of undernourished people, reaching 256.1 million in 2018.

FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative – Toward Effective Partnerships for Accelerated Actions and Greater Impact on Poverty and Hunger

7. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has launched the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, an evidence-based, country-owned and country-led initiative that is consistent with the principles enshrined in SDGs and conceived as a support to the programmatic vision of the Malabo Declaration. The Hand-in-Hand initiative prioritizes measures to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG2) by accelerating agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development. In doing so, it contributes to the attainment of all the other SDGs and the objectives of the Malabo Declaration).

8. The initiative uses the most sophisticated tools available, including advanced geo-spatial modelling and analytics, to identify the biggest opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of the rural populations who constitute the vast majority of the world's poor. It uses these tools to understand a comprehensive view of full economic opportunities and to improve targeting and tailoring of policy interventions, innovation, finance and investment, and institutional reform accordingly. It thus prioritizes countries where national capacities and international support are most limited or where operational challenges, including natural- or man-made crises, are greatest. This is in keeping with the UN's priority commitment to "leave no one behind."

9. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative adopts a geographical, market-oriented food systems approach to increase the quantity, quality, diversity and accessibility of nutritious foods available in local, regional and national food markets. It works to strengthen food system capacities to deliver nutrition and healthy diets for everyone and improve household incomes to reduce extreme poverty. It ensures that internationally agreed norms and standards are fully reflected in policies that advance all three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. To this end, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative promotes the sustainable use of biodiversity, natural resources and ecosystem services,

³ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2019. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019. Safeguarding against economic slowdowns. Rome, FAO.

and supports climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience as well as other key objectives of the Malabo declaration and the 2030 Agenda, including gender empowerment, youth employment and developing rural-urban linkages around sustainable food systems.

10. Data and advanced analytics underpin the Hand-in-Hand Initiative enabling governments and their investment partners to identify interactions and evaluate trade-offs among objectives and actions, helping to pinpoint key bottlenecks and opportunities for innovation, investment and institutional change. With a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative aims to deliver a first set of benchmark results by 2023, and aims to strengthen further the capacities of member countries to monitor progress and mutual learning, thus facilitating effective partnerships in support of the countries' efforts towards achieving these goals.

11. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative seeks to strengthen existing international cooperation and fill the void where it is absent. Building on its country presence and goodwill, FAO convenes partnerships to deliver the necessary means of implementation, which means bringing in the international financial institutions, donors and technical partners to put technical and policy knowledge into action as well as attracting private-sector investment by providing information on areas of investment for development. Effective public and private partnerships lead to achievement of results that transform lives and promote sustainable landscapes.

II. Expected Outcomes

12. The Ministerial Roundtable offers an opportunity to take stock of the progress made on the achievement of the Malabo commitments on agriculture as well as SDGs 1 and 2, and highlight the need for accelerated actions for meeting the goals in a context of achieving rural and agricultural transformation. As part of this effort, it aims to explore experiences and opportunities for forging and strengthening effective partnerships that deliver means of implementation.

13. The Roundtable will discuss the opportunities that the FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative can offer to revitalize support country-led and country-owned actions and to identify those places where sustainable development of agriculture and agri-food value chains can serve to end poverty and hunger, as well as the potential contribution of the initiative to the achievement of all the other objectives of the Malabo Declaration and the SDGs. It will consider possibilities to strengthen means of implementation, and adopts a flexible and innovative matchmaking approach to building partnerships that strengthen resource mobilization to accelerate progress toward achievement of national sustainable development priorities for food and agriculture.

14. Furthermore, the Roundtable discusses ways in which national capacities for improved data integration, analysis and visualization can be strengthened in order to recognize and assign quantitative values to interactions, interdependencies and tradeoffs among policy actions designed to address multiple objectives under the 2030 Agenda. Participants will draw recommendations on the utility of improved analytics to enable better-informed decision-making for investment, innovation, and policy and institutional change.

III. Roundtable Organization

15. The theme of the Roundtable is "Hand-in Hand Initiative for Enhanced Results and Impact on Poverty, Hunger and Malnutrition in Africa". The Roundtable will be a moderated interactive session. After an introduction, a presentation of FAO's "Hand-in-Hand Initiative" will set the scene for subsequent interventions by panellists. This will be followed by open discussion, experience

sharing, and lessons learning. Finally, concluding remarks will summarize the key messages and recommendations, which will be included in the final report of the ARC.

16. Issues that could guide the discussion:
- a. What are the key issues and gaps that need to be addressed towards accelerating progress on Malabo and Agenda 2030 objectives and commitments through agricultural and rural transformation?
 - b. How can the Hand in Hand Initiative be used to address the key issues and gaps? What is required to make it effective?
 - c. What experiences and practices regarding international collaboration can be shared among countries on how to construct more effective partnerships to eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition in Africa? Where do partnerships typically falter, and what can or should be done to avoid these failings?
 - d. How can the new data-sharing systems and analytics introduced by FAO under the Hand in Hand Initiative be linked and even co-developed with regional and national institutions in order to identify key interactions and trade-offs among priority policy interventions and to better target policy interventions, including innovation, investment and institutional change?
 - e. What kinds of innovation in partnering among regional countries, and between regional and extra-regional countries, including South-South partnering, could be introduced under the Initiative?
 - f. In practical terms, how can the commitment under the Hand in Hand Initiative to improved systems for impact monitoring and evaluation be adapted to strengthen existing monitoring and reporting progress on Malabo commitments and SDGs as part of strengthening mutual accountability?
 - g. How do you consider the role of FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative in revitalizing the support for country-led and country owned actions towards the achievements of the Malabo commitments and the SDGs?

Agenda and participants

	Chair: Minister
11:00-11:07	Welcome and introduction – Patrice Talla, Subregional Coordinator, Southern Africa, FAO
11:07-11:15	Introductory remarks by Mr QU Dongyu, Director-General, FAO
11:15-11:35	Presentation of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative – Maximo Torero, Chief Economist, FAO
11:30-12:15	Panel Discussion with panellists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AUC Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture - Ministers (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe) - IFI (World Bank) - UN (Resident Coordinator) - Private Sector - Farmers Organization Representative
12:15-12:45	Open discussion – experiences and perspectives
12:40-13:00	Wrap Up and Closing Remarks – Moderator, Patrice Talla

